WAR SCENES

I SHALL NEVER FORGET

BY

CARITA SPENCER

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FOREWORD

The scenes and occurrences which are recorded in these pages made such a deep impression upon me and have remained so vivid that I hope the recital of them may be found interesting to others.

My sole purpose in publishing this book is to obtain funds for war relief. Every penny of the proceeds from its sale will be devoted to that object.

The reader will note that casual reference without mention of names is made to a number of individuals who are directing relief work with efficiency and devotion. These are only a few of the many I had the privilege of meeting, and whose methods of work I studied. If any one is interested in sending assistance to a particular class

of war sufferers suggested by the reading of these sketches, he or she may communicate with me at 10 East 58th Street, New York City. I shall take pleasure in giving the names and addresses of those on the other side of the water most responsible to act as distributors of such generosity.

CARITA SPENCER.

New York, 1917.

WAR SCENES I SHALL NEVER FORGET

I

Paris, April, 1916.

"La Légation de Belgique a l'honneur de faire connaître à Miss Spencer que Sa Majesté la Reine la recevra Vendredi prochain, 28 avril, à La Panne, à 2 heures et demie. Miss Spencer est priée de vouloir bien prevenir La Légation, du lieu et de l'heure ou on pourrait la faire prendre à Dunkerque ou à Calais."

For six weeks I had wondered where and how the door to the war zone would open, and here at last came the answer. "The Belgian Legation has the honor to inform

Miss Spencer that Her Majesty, the Queen, will receive her on Friday at La Panne at half past two." My only anxiety was to be the decision whether the motor should be sent for me to Calais or to Dunkerque. At last I could reply to the ingenuous suggestions from home that, being in the land of war, why didn't I see something of military activity? Just as if going to the front was like walking down Fifth Avenue, and I could arrive by placing one foot after the other. It was midnight when the letter came, too late to do anything until the morrow, when I must find the way to break all rules for civilians and get out of Paris in three hours instead of eight days.

My official invitation was certainly a wonderful gate-opener. Legations, embassy and war office armed me with the necessary papers in less time than it usually took to reach the sub-clerk in the commissaire's

office. Dressed in my khaki suit and my little brown hat with the laurel leaves,—funny little hat, since become famous because so many officers thought I wore the leaves as a presage of victory in honor of the Allies,—with my small handbag, heavy coat and an umbrella, I reached the Gare St. Lazare with twenty minutes to spare. Ahead of me were two English officers, shiny and polished from head to foot, with their elaborate hand luggage all neatly marked. One might think they were running down for a week-end at the Casino. On all sides crowded sky-blue-coated *poilus,* the faded dull looking sky-blue which blends into the horizon and helps to hide the French soldier from the keen-sighted Bosch.

Have you ever stood by the gate to the trains and watched the men come up to go back to the front? Some come slowly, slouching along in their stiff boots under

the weight of their heavy knapsacks and equipment, tired-eyed but determined. Others come running up in twos and threes, cheerful and carefree. Others come with their wives and children, their mothers, their sweethearts; and these do not talk, unless it be the tiny tots, too small to know what it is all about. Nor do they weep. They just walk up to the gate, kiss him good-by and stand aside, and look as long as their eyes can follow him. Sometimes he turns back, but not often. I watched a while, then I too went through, showing my papers to several inquisitive officials in succession.

Everything was quite like ordinary times until we passed E——, where we lost the last of the civilians on the train except myself. My compartment was quite empty, and as I stuck my head into the corridor it seemed as if the rest of the car were also empty. But no, there was a turkey gobbler

in a wooden cage, and in a moment a French officer bending over him with a cup of water. It seemed the gobbler, poor innocent bird, was on his way to make gay an officer's mess.

Soon we came to what still remains one of the most impressive sights of my trip, the miles of English reserve camp. Sand dunes, setting sun and distant sea, and tents and tents, and barracks and tents, and men in khaki never ending! Those bright, happy, healthy faces! Why, as the train crawled through them, so close I could shake hands out of the window, I fairly thrilled with the conviction that they could never be beaten. I wanted to shout at them: "Boys, I'm from over the water too, God bless you all!" But it choked in my throat, for they came from Canada and Australia and New Zealand to give their lives for a principle, while I came from the land "too proud to fight."

There were the shooting ranges and the

bayonet targets, burlaps the size of a man's torso stuffed with straw, hanging on a clothesline in a row. The boys stand off a hundred yards and with fixed bayonets charge the bursting burlap. But now, at sunset, they are sitting around in groups or playing games, waiting for their evening meal. They have not faced fire yet, but their turn is coming and they are keen for it.

The officer and the turkey descended at Boulogne and darkness closed down about the same time. There was only a shaded night lamp in the car, and the lonesomeness of the unknown began to take hold of me. The train crawled on about as fast as a horse would jog. I was hungry, as with civilian-like lack of forethought I had provided myself with no lunch or dinner. I sat close to the window, looking for the lights of Calais which never came. The train stopped and a kindly conductor with a white

badge on his arm, which shows that he is mobilized, helped me to stumble out in the dark. There had been a "Zep" alarm, and not a single light was visible in the overcast night. I pushed along with groups of soldiers into the station, where, in an inner room, an officer sat at a small table with a small shaded safety lamp and examined passports. He was duly suspicious of me until I showed him the Legation paper. Stumbling and groping like the blind man in Blind Man's Buff, I was finally rescued by a small boy who piloted me across the bridge to a door which he said was the G—— hotel. They refused to give me food because not even a candle was permitted. In the dark I went to bed.

Early next morning I looked from the window on an animated square. Tommies, Tommies everywhere. Was it England after all instead of France? The Belgian *réformé*

who will carry a limp to his dying day as his ever-present memory of the great war, and who acted as my chamberman, could not do enough for me when he heard that I was going to see his Queen. He spoke of her as of the dearest loved member of his family. She was a real Queen, he said. She loved and cared for the poor and suffering. He had even seen her once and she had smiled at him when he wore his uniform with his *croix de guerre*.

The palace motor came promptly at 12:30 and into it I got with my little bag, wondering whether I was going into Belgium to remain two hours, two days or two weeks. I noticed that the car had seen service. The glass was cracked even where protected by wire netting and the upholstering was threadbare in spots, but there was nothing the matter with the engine, and we whizzed along at a goodly pace. And now began

what I call the saluting habit. All the two weeks that I was on Belgian soil I was of course never unattended, and if any passing soldier did not salute the officer at my side or the official motor in which I rode, I was conscious of an extraordinary omission.

We passed in and out of towns with guards at attention. Even at the frontier we were not stopped. The country was flat and the roads fearfully dusty. The heavy motor lorries and trucks which were constantly traveling with supplies from the base to the front interested me greatly, as they were the first I had seen in action. They came in groups of three to thirty, and the boys on the drivers' seats were so caked with dust I could hardly distinguish their features. My official motor carried a special horn which cleared the road of man and beast. The fields on all sides were tilled. I wondered who the workers were, when what

do you think I saw? Forty children in a row, boys and girls, all ages, from the little tot to the boy who would next year be in the army, each with a hoe. In front of them stood an old man who beat time with a stick while the children plied the hoe, and I warrant they had a happy time doing it.

At last I knew we must be nearing La Panne, for soldiers became more numerous. There is always one division of the Belgian Army *en repos* at La Panne. The motor made several sharp turns, and as long as I live I shall never forget the scene. Warm sunshine, a sandy beach over an eighth of a mile wide—small breakers—a line of brightly colored seaside houses and villas—little sloops on the sea and warships in the distance—cavalry manœuvering on the sands—the dunes at either end and behind—neat white veiled nurses and brightly clad convalescent soldiers on the walk and in the

sands—the distant booming of big guns, probably English—and the nearer sounds of practice rifle and machine gun firing.

In a small villa I met the Queen, pretty, charming and gracious, with wonderful eyes that seemed to look straight through me and beyond. We talked for quite a long time and she asked me what would interest me most to see in the little corner of Belgian Belgium. I replied that I should like to see everything that was being done in a constructive way for the soldiers, civilians, children. With the promise that my wish would be gratified I took my leave and was then escorted to the villa of the famous Dr. Depage, where I remained for a week as his guest. The hospital is a wonder of excellence in every way. Charming ladies efficiently shoulder the burdens of the trained nurse, and they and doctors work hours on

end when the wounded come in crowds from the nearby trenches.

At sunset descended an English aëroplane on the beach. In a few minutes it was surrounded by a couple of hundred men in khaki, just as if they had sprung out of the ground. Then off it went, gracefully dipping in a low sweeping curve in front of the "palace," then soaring high as it struck out to sea. Then the beach guard changed, and suddenly over the front only a few miles away appeared a Belgian plane with German shrapnel bursting in little black puffs around it. I went with Dr. Depage to see the wounded arriving in the ambulances, and I took a thirty second peep at a leg operation in the doing. At dinner—a very frugal but good one—we talked of everything except war. And this was my first day at the front.

Belgian Cavalry on the Sands at La Panne

II

Trenches La Panne, May, 1916.

SEVEN o'clock in the morning and I had just returned from the trenches, fairly well-behaved trenches, but real ones nevertheless, for several German bullets had sought us as a target in the early morning mist. It was all unreal, for I saw nothing. Yet I had to believe it, for I heard.

Thanks to the courtesy of a gallant staff captain and a charming gray-haired general, I made this unique expedition. The captain and I started before daylight in the cold of a gray morning and rode to the trenches in a comfortable limousine. The fields about were desolate, even the trees destroyed. Here and there a heap of stones, the remains of a thrifty farm, sheltered a small company

of soldiers. The roads were unspeakable, so deep the holes and ruts. We passed through P——. There were still a few walls standing, and there we picked up a piece of marble to make me a paper weight. I knew the Germans were not far off, for the cannonading was continuous about three miles down on our right. But for all I could see I might as well have been on the western prairies.

"What in the world is straw fixed up that way for?" I asked.

"That is a curtain of straw which stretches for miles along the road behind the trenches to hide our motors from the enemy. A motor means an officer, and if they could see us we would not be here long."

We stopped behind the straw screen and got out, crawling under it into a communication trench. I had better call them ramparts, for this district, you know, was the

In the Trenches on the Yser

Between the Main and Front Line Trenches

inundated land of the Yser. One hundred yards in this winding alley of concrete and sand-bag wall and we reached the main trench, a solid substantial rampart of concrete, sand-bags and earth, with the grass growing on the side facing the enemy. Here the soldiers on duty lived in their little cubby-holes in the wall. They slept in groups of fours, stretched out on clean straw with their guns beside them ready for sudden call. And, if you please, do not suppose that these domiciles went unnamed or unadorned. By the irony of fate the first wooden door we came to was thus inscribed, all in French, of course:

Villa "Ne T'en Fais Pas"!
War with Notes!
Wilson-Bethman!
Hurry up, you Neutrals!

How common-place trench life has become after these two long years of habit!

Nowadays men do not go to the office and the shop. They go up to the trenches for daily duties. These trenches we were in were main-line, where the enemy was not supposed to penetrate unless rude enough actually to break through. So the soldiers portioned off the rough earth beside the board walk that ran parallel to the rampart, and first they had a little vegetable garden, and next to it for beauty's sake a little flower garden, and next to that a little graveyard, and then the succession repeated. Five hundred yards beyond the main lines, across the inundated fields streaked with barbed wire sticking up out of the water, was the front line trench, a rougher rampart, mostly of earth, and when it rained, oh mud! Under cover of darkness the boys went out and returned, walking across a rickety board walk.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Those were sharp

Beside the Trenches, in Front of "Villa Ne t'en Fais Pas"

shots and sounded like business. They might become more personal than the steady heavy roar of guns sending up their smoke at D—— on our right. We dared not tarry, for the sun was coming up.

The Major of the line was waiting to greet us and offered us early morning refreshment in his dug-out. His dug-out was a cozy, comfy little place, two boarded rooms in the rampart wall, high enough to stand up in, and furnished with a cot and blankets and some chairs and a stove and a mirror and some pictures, and, yes, a latch on the door to enter by. If I had had no ears it would have been difficult to persuade me that there were men not far off who, without personal animosity, would gladly have landed a shell in our midst.

The war as I glimpsed it in the many phases I was able at least to touch upon always gave me the impression of running

up against a blank wall of contradiction. To people who live week in and week out in the range of shell fire, life and death take on a new relationship. Death may come at any moment, and yet meantime life must be lived, and one can't live all the time at high pressure. Perhaps no more vivid instance of this came to me than when I was sitting in barracks near F—— as the guest of that wonderful woman, Mrs. I—— T——. Up with the dawn, she and her fellow worker slaved without intermission, caring for the poor civilians of F——. They taught and fed the kiddies, dispensed medical and even surgical help, going out across the fields through the darkness at any call; gave out food and clothing to the women who came daily to claim their portion. Then, the day's hard work over, came dinner, at which an officer or two, French, Belgian, English, even American, might drop in, and afterwards

my hostess would sit at the piano and sing Debussy with a voice of beauty and volume, while all the time the guns would thunder, the aëros might be overhead, and men were being killed on all sides. One's mind hardly grasped it, but one's emotions ran high.

III

P——, May, 1916.

P—— was close by the famous Ypres and had the honor at the moment of being a bombarded town. Hardly a day passed that shells did not fall here in greater or less quantity. Have you ever been in a bombarded town? Gloom? You could cut it with a knife, and yet I could not make out why the gloom was so oppressive. The streets were full of soldiers—Tommies, Canadians, Australians—bustling about, cheerfully whistling, talking in groups or going about their individual duties. Peasant women were in evidence too, and the little shops had window displays; but oh the gloom! Many of the houses were destroyed

and in some sections there was no such thing as a pane of glass left. The noise of the guns was almost constant.

I was staying in a hospital with the Countess V——, a front line ambulance in this section where fighting had been heavy. It was an old red brick building, probably the home of one of P——'s wealthier residents. The high-ceilinged rooms were bare of furniture and in its place were rows of cheap iron cots with a wounded man in each. The Countess was one of those charming, dainty feminine creatures with a will of iron and a courage beyond words. The story of her life during the first invasion of Belgium and her escape from German territory was thrilling. She came to P——, where she cared not only for this house full of wounded soldiers, but worked and planned with others the support and care of civilian wounded, men, women and little children, and of hun-

dreds of little orphan boys and girls. My room was on the ground floor. It had half a window pane, one boarded-up window and some heavy blankets to hang up at night to hide the candle light from a prying aëro. I simply can't describe the gloom. The Countess said that when she felt that she could not go on another minute, she just hunted out the box her husband had sent her when she got word to him that she had no more clothes and to send on some of her old ones. The box contained three filmy negligees, the ones he loved her best in. She got them out and spread them about the dismal room, and then she stood in the middle and laughed and cried until she felt better.

I sat outside on a bench one morning talking to a young Belgian officer who was so badly wounded the first year of the war that he will probably never go back to the front. We were talking of beautiful things, music,

painting and such like. One of the ambulances drove in. He paid no attention, it was such a common occurrence, but I was all eyes. You have seen the ice wagon dripping on a warm day? The ambulance was dripping too, but the drops were red! One stretcher was lifted out and an orderly standing by raised the cover at one end. I saw something that had once been a head with a human face on it. The next stretcher contained a man wounded in the legs. One of the nurses spoke to him and he tried to smile. The next was carried without comment to the tiny stone hut in the fast-growing little graveyard just back of the house. These kind folk would find time to bury him and send a picture of his grave with a few words of how bravely he had died, together with the number on the chain at his wrist, to Headquarters to be forwarded to his family. And he was a cook who had never held a

gun or seen an enemy. So they emptied the ambulance to the number of six and then they turned the hose on it and started it back for its next load. And may I tell you how the ever-present contrast came in here? Upstairs in the convalescent ward a boy, to cheer his comrades, was banging the jolliest kind of music on an old tin piano, impatiently waiting the day when he would be declared well enough to go back to be wounded again.

In Front of the Hospital at P——

The Countess V—— Near a Shell-hole

IV

P——, May, 1916.

One of the big hospital clearing stations for this active point in the English lines was at P——. It was a great big gloomy old barracks of a building with never a window pane in its many windows. After an active night, lines of ambulances would arrive and disburden at its doors. Generally before twenty-four hours had passed the arrivals of that day must be moved on to the beautiful new barracks hospital near the station or direct into the hospital train, which waited until it was full and then started out for the rear.

I went with the young wounded Belgian officer to visit this new English barracks

hospital. It was a model. The head nurse, neat and trim as though she had stepped out from a private case, showed us around. The operating room was perfect, three operations going on at once. I stopped to watch the extraction of a bullet. Such sights were always horrible, but the consciousness that the man was temporarily out of pain under the anæsthetic made it much easier than looking on when the dressings were done. We saw the kitchens, the storerooms, the regular wards where the men lay in neat white cots, and finally the receiving ward. That was not nice. Some seventy-five wounded had just arrived. Most of them were still in their uniforms, lying on cots covered with blankets, or on the very stretchers that brought them. The only sounds in the long narrow room were muffled groans, an occasional curse, and now and then a louder cry from some poor soul, even though

Tent Hospital for Civilians

he was being handled by nurse and surgeon as gently as possible. As we entered the door it seemed as if every eye was turned in our direction, and every eye was full of pain, almost the kind of look you would see come from a silent suffering animal. At my very feet lay a six-foot stalwart Englishman, his clothes caked with mud, his beard and hair a tangled mat. He was doing his best to endure, but in spite of himself his head and arms thrashed about, he gripped the sides of the stretcher, he jerked the blanket which covered him and disclosed one leg from the hip down, a mangled mass of clothes, blood and flesh. Another, a boy of about eighteen, sat on the edge of his cot with a face like chalk and his breath coming in quick gasps, while a doctor was hurriedly stuffing a great, round, red hole in his back with what seemed like yards of the gauze packing the women in America are making. Another one sat

propped against pillows, his head and face completely bandaged, with two rubber tubes sticking out of the bandage. I felt so sick I wondered whether I could stick it out. For some unexplainable reason my mind shifted back home to a conversation I had overheard not many weeks before. Two of my friends were discussing the merits of a couple of gowns. One gown could be had for $300, but the other was a bit prettier, and, after all, it only cost $50 more. I suppose such things have to be, but I do not believe they would be quite so often, if more of us could visit in fact or in imagination the scenes of Europe to-day. It made me think of the phrase I had recently heard spoken by an American. "And so it goes! We spend money for things we really don't need and eat far too much food—and they go on fighting for everything we hold dear. Oh, if we

could only show the people at home all that we have seen—and what it means!"

Of course there must always be poverty, and there must always be suffering, but the ordinary every-day physical suffering is not that of the strong and well, who, for the sake of a principle and with almost superhuman self-sacrifice, go forth to be mutilated or killed. Nor is it the suffering of those who, through interminable days of anxiety and oppression, cheerfully face the drudgery of war-life behind the lines, again with that supreme sense of sacrifice of themselves to the good of the state and to the principle of what they believe is justice.

The young Belgian saw the horror which I could scarcely hide from my face and smiled wearily. "You think this is awful, don't you? You should have seen what was here last winter before these beautiful barracks were built. It was January, fearfully

cold, and the rain had been incessant for days. The Bosch were bombarding P—— so hard that every hospital there had to be evacuated and we were all brought here, no matter what our condition. This place then consisted of hospital tents with one small stove in the center and no floor but the muddy ground under our feet. I was brought here along with eighty-two others, and we were all placed in a big, round tent, some of us on stretchers, some of us rolled in blankets, and some of us just in the mud. The next morning I was one of seven to be taken out alive. Oh, we know what the fellows have to go through when a big push is on, and we know what the necessities and comforts sent us from over the water mean in such awful times. Tell your American friends that, and how grateful we are."

We were on a hospital tour that morning, so although I felt as if I had seen enough

pain and blood to last me for the rest of my normal life, I did not refuse to go on. We stopped at the new little hospital barracks for wounded civilians, who were being so happily cared for, thanks to the never-failing activity of the Countess V——. It may seem strange that the peasant would rather remain in his own little home in the midst of his own little fields and garden patch, with the shells falling all about him, than to pack his cart and move his family to another section. Yet it is perfectly natural when you stop to think. The whole world to the European peasant is the little spot on which he was born and has lived. The rest of the earth is a great and horrible unknown to him. And then, what shall he do? His entire livelihood depends upon the bit of earth he owns. Who is going to give him a garden and a house somewhere miles over the hills? So it is often only by military force that the

peasant can be driven out of range of the guns, and meantime every day brings its casualties. The pathetic sight of old men and old women, little babies, bright-eyed boys and girls, enduring the same suffering as the soldier, seemed so unnecessary, but yet there it was.

I bought some pretty lace which the children made at a little school nearby this hospital, and which they sold for the benefit of their wounded brothers and sisters. I wouldn't have believed such *little* girls could have done it, if I had not seen them at work.

We returned to the Countess' hospital about sundown for tea and a much-needed rest from the sight of horrors. That night we were guests at the officers' mess. It is not often that a woman graces the dinner table in this gloomy town, and so everything was done to make the occasion festive. There was a menu card, an artistic creation, and

SOMEWHERE IN FLANDERS

MENU.

2 Mai

Potage Parmentier
Veau Printannier
Choux-Fleurs au Parmesan
Poperinghe Cake
Desserts

St Eustéphe
1900

Menu in Flanders

place cards and two beautiful wild flower bouquets for the Countess and myself, and the best wine that still remained in the almost depleted cellar. After dinner, as usual, we talked about nearly everything except war, and yet I felt all the time the undercurrent of tension. I knew that some part of each one's consciousness was ever watchful for the shell or aëro bomb which might come any minute. One of their dearest comrades had been killed on the doorstep of this very house only a few weeks previous.

Usually the arrival of enemy aëroplanes is announced and every one takes to cover. Sometimes it is the custom to ring a bell or to blow whistles, and sometimes a boy rides through the town on a bicycle sounding a horn of peculiar quality, which means the aëros are coming. But no aëros came that night, and about 10 o'clock we rode through the deserted, silent, narrow, little streets back to the hospital and to bed.

V

Orphelinats, P. ——, May, 1916.

THE next morning we went on a long ride over the hills to visit the little Belgian orphans and see how they were being cared for on French soil. As there was no military motor available, and as, for the one and only time in my war travels, I was unarmed with papers to get me across the frontier, we decided to do the eighty miles in an ambulance, where I could hide in the back as we whizzed past the familiar sentries. Mlle. M——, in her well-worn khaki suit with the Red Cross badge, sat in front with the chauffeur. Within the ambulance, on the hard wooden bench, was I with that wonderful hero of Ypres, the Abbé of St. Pierre. What a face of strength and poise and thoughtful-

The Famous Abbe of Ypres

ness he had! To the people of that country he was a saint, specially protected by heaven. He seemed to have led a charmed life. He was the last to leave the battered ruins of the once beautiful Ypres. They say he saved even the cats before he would depart, and still the longing to return to his beloved town came over him so strongly that at times his friends had great difficulty in restraining him. He loved every stone and he godfathered every poor child of the village. Shells have burst all around him, killing those at his side, but, by some wonder of fate, have left him untouched. His smile was a delight, his conversation a charm.

Along the white, dusty road we flew, for we had many miles to cover and several stops to make. Every one is familiar with the beautiful rolling country of this part of France, the cultivated fields, the neat little villages, the white ribbon of road between

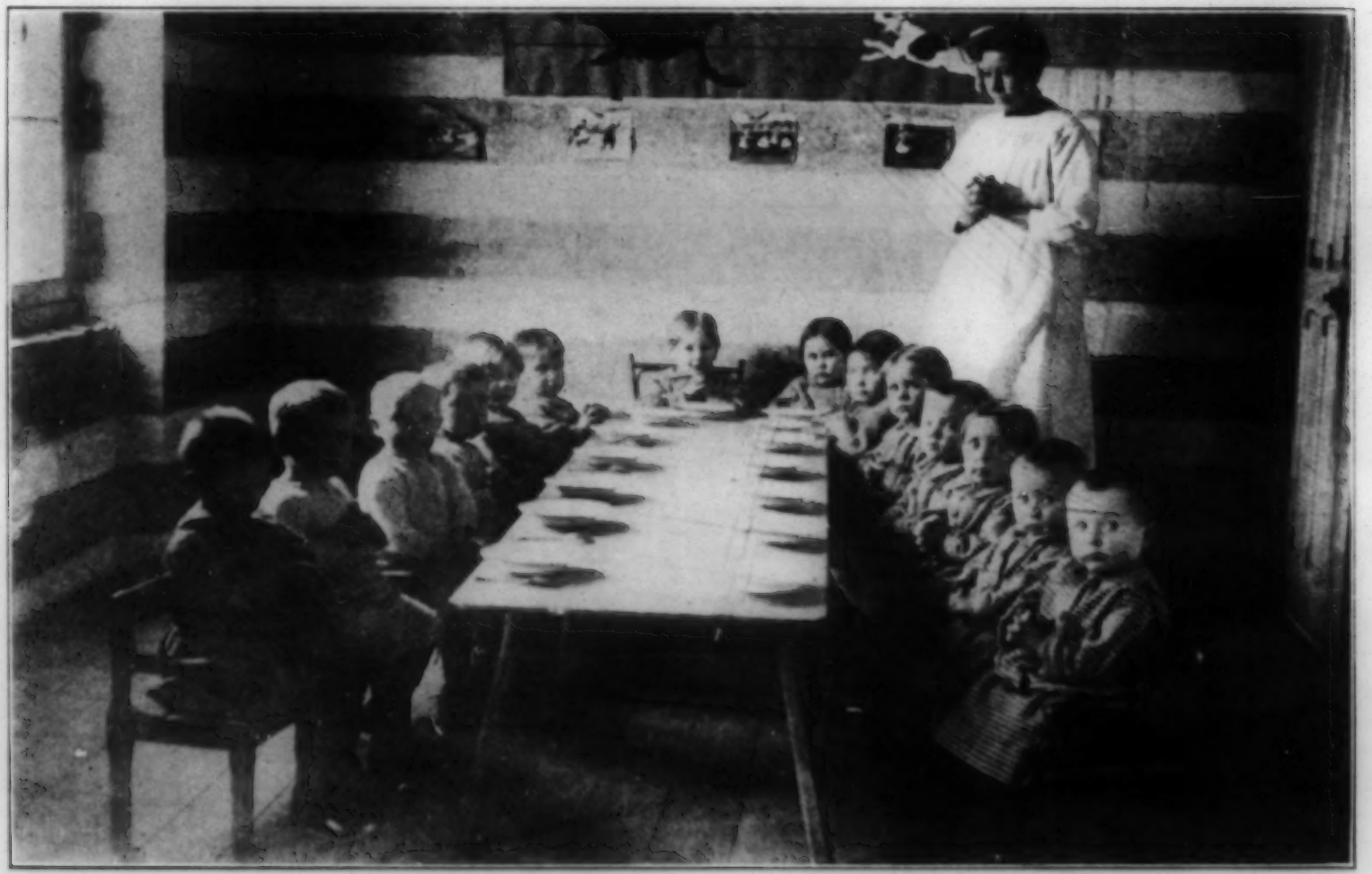
the well-ordered rows of trees. I could not resist waving a triumphant salute at the astonished sentries when they realized they had let pass an ambulance with a civilian in it, and a woman at that! But the clouds of dust hid us from view before they could do anything about it. We passed through B——, a lovely little town way up on a hill-top, from which we could look down over the distant valley in whose heart the hostile lines of trenchmen fought for supremacy. We stopped here to leave a message with an officer and learned that nearly every one in the town was ill with a touch of asphyxiating gas. It seemed that the fumes had penetrated this far during the night, but were not strong enough to awaken people. So they had inhaled unconsciously. Every one sleeps with a gas mask at the head of his bed in these parts.

We coasted down the long hill on the

other side of the town, glorying in the beauty of the extended view before us. How could there be anything but happiness in the world that brilliant morning! The Abbé and I talked of many things and he told me how he and the Countess planned and worked to get enough money and clothing for the hundreds of orphans in their care. If only some of the discarded but still useful warm clothing of my little friends in America could be sent! And think of the untold joy some of their superfluous toys would give!

Our first stop was to see the boys, and certainly for me it was a unique experience. The Abbé announced that a great treat was in store for us, as we were to lunch with the priests of W——, who ran the *orphelinat.* He told me to be sure to ask Father ——, the jolly, fat, old fellow, to sing and recite for us. He said it would please him enormously and would give us untold amuse-

ment, and he was right. We entered the courtyard of an old stone house, and after shaking off several layers of the white dust, went in to the bounteous feast prepared in our honor. The welcome was simple and cordial. We washed our hands in an old tin basin and used the coarsest towel I have ever seen. I am sure it will never wear out. Then we sat down to enough food for twenty instead of six, and how they did enjoy it! I don't wonder Father —— was almost as broad as he was long, if he enjoyed every meal as much as he did this one. He ordered up *the* wine from the cellar, the last precious bottle he had carried away from Ypres, and then, after much persuasion, he rose at his end of the table and in a dear, gentle, cracked old voice, mouthing his words so that his apparently one remaining front tooth was much in evidence, he sang the favorite songs of his youth. I am sure they were funny



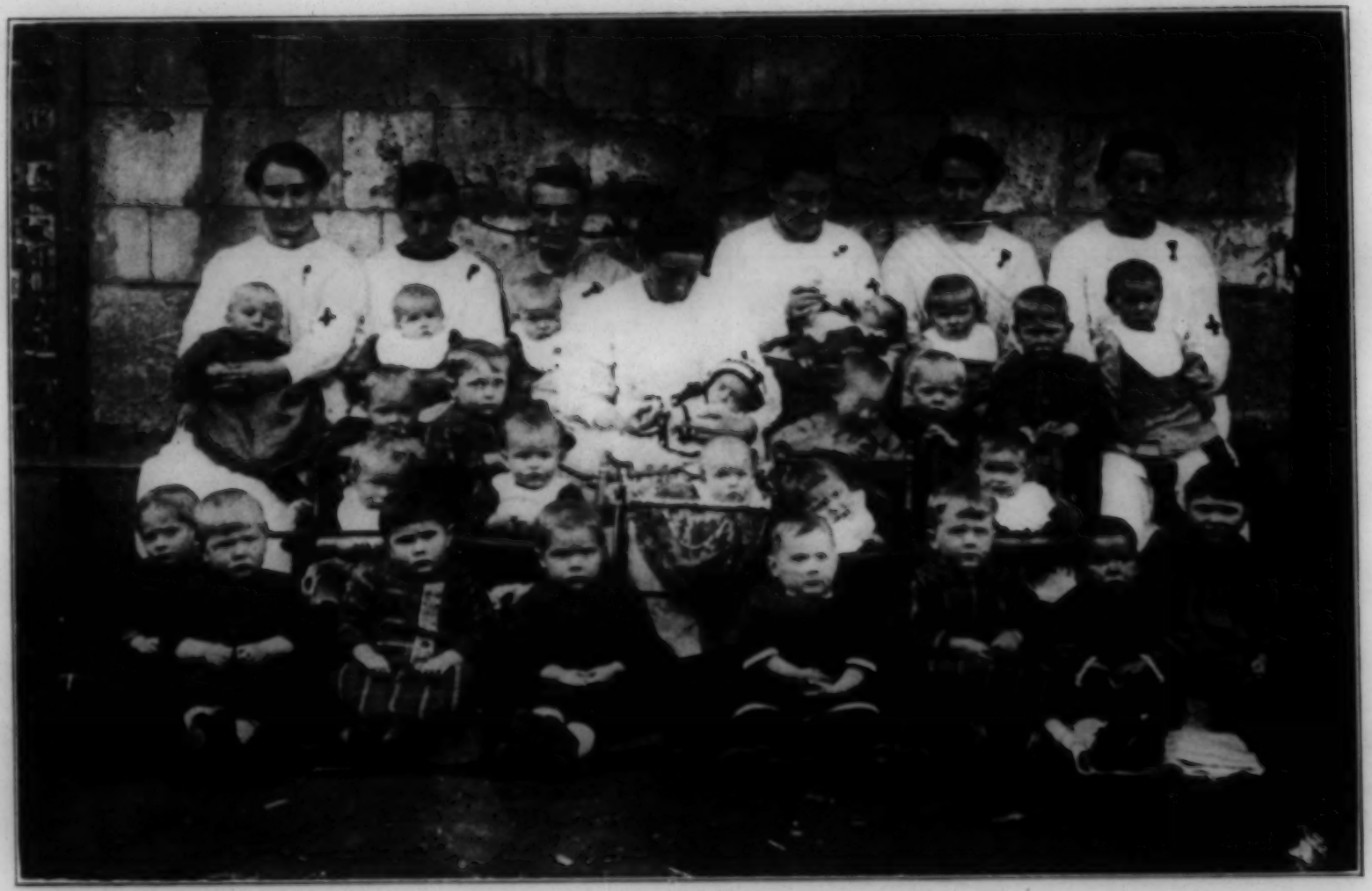
The Tiny Tots at Supper

because he laughed at them so heartily himself.

Luncheon over, we walked to the boys' dormitories. How they did love the jolly old priest, and how glad they were to see the Abbé! From all corners of the courtyard they dropped their play or their fight, as the case was, and came running with all the joy of a pack of little tail-wiggling fox terriers, to throw themselves upon the two men. Where he carried it, I do not know, but the Abbé produced cake after cake of chocolate and every boy had a bite.

The boys are taught all the simple studies and always to sing. The Belgian peasant children really sing beautifully. Even the little tots can take parts. We went up through the dormitories. There were closely filled rows of cots graduated in size, and over the foot of each one the sisters in charge had neatly laid out the boy's *other* suit, for

to-morrow would be Sunday and they would all be dressed up. The lavatories consisted of wooden benches, again graduated in height, with tin basins and towels on them, about one to every three boys. It made me shiver to think how cold that place must be during the long damp winter, but then the peasant is used to such hardships. Finally we came to the schoolroom, where the older boys were already hard at work, learning in both Flemish and French. And of all the cute sights I ever saw, here happened the very cutest. The tiny tots, three and four years old, had finished their lunch and their playtime, and must have their noonday nap. Were they put to bed like ordinary babies? Oh, no. They tumbled into the schoolroom, their big eyes staring out of their chubby, round, little faces, full of wonder as to who the strange lady was. Somewhat abashed and very quietly they slid along their baby



Belgian Orphans at Wisques

bench, snuggling up to each other as close as they could. Then at a word from the teacher all the little right arms went up on the long bench table in front of them, the perfectly round little heads flopped over into the crook of the row of little elbows, three blinks, and all the little eyelids closed, and like peas in a pod they were asleep. How I wished for a moving picture of that scene!

Last we visited the chapel, of which Father —— was so proud. A little musty-smelling chapel with a crude figure of the Madonna in a high window niche at one end. Father —— had placed above it a pane of blue glass, of a blue which turned the sunlight into a wonderfully cool, pure color. He said it was the emblem of hope to him, and that when his heart was heavy behind his cheerful smile, he would come in there alone to think and to pray.

We were in no hurry to go, but there was

still a long stretch to be covered before we reached Wisques, where the girls were housed. So we said good-by to Father ——, his priests, and his children. I only hope I may see them again some day.

Our ride was now enlivened by the presence of many aëroplanes, friendly ones, maneuvering now near the earth, now so high that they were almost lost to sight. They were probably indulging in preliminary exercises before scouting over the German lines.

Arrived at Wisques, we were welcomed by the nuns into the beautiful old château, now an orphan asylum. The Queen had recently paid a visit here and the whole place was decorated in her honor with colored papers and garlands of leaves and branches. It had been a very great and wonderful occasion for the motherless little girls. Coffee was served us out of a brilliantly shining kettle

from the huge old-fashioned stove in the great open fireplace. Everything was so spotlessly clean! The nuns certainly took good care of the children. The girls' dormitories were neat, here and there brightened by a piece of colored cloth or a picture or a bit of ribbon. There were only the barest necessities, and none too many of them. The girls were taught to do the housework and to sew, in addition to their regular school studies. They were all dressed in black and the Mother Superior bemoaned the fact that the Abbé simply could not keep them in shoes. Several classes were assembled to sing for us, Belgian and French songs, and finally in my honor the nearest they could come to anything American, "God Save the King" —at least that was in the "strange lady's" language—English.

I wandered away from the others and out of doors into the garden. There were the

real babies, most of them just big enough to walk. They were digging and playing, twenty-five or more of them, in charge of a couple of the older girls and one nurse. I sat down on a broken stump and tried to make love to one of the little boys. He was awfully shy at first and would just look at me out of his big blue eyes. All of a sudden he toddled over to the other side of the yard and after him toddled the whole bunch. He was certainly a coming leader. In the far corner was a perfect carpet of dandelions. Each baby picked one or two and, like a flock of little chicks, they came tumbling back again to present me with the flowers. It was too sweet for words and the tears came to my eyes. I wanted to hug them all. I asked the nurse whether this was a customary performance and she said she had never seen them do such a thing before. If only all the little war orphans were cared for

as well as these in charge of the good Abbé! May money and supplies never fail to come to him for this good work.

The Abbé took us to see the trenches and barbed wire entanglements which surrounded the hilltop. Even these many miles behind the lines they were prepared. Thank heaven we feel sure that now these trenches will never see blood.

It was a long ride back, and I am sure there were no springs to that ambulance. How does a wounded soldier survive the jolting even if he is suspended on a stretcher? was the question I kept asking myself, for I was sore from head to foot. We arrived back at the hospital too late for dinner with the others and tired enough to go straight to bed, but the Countess said I must stay up a while and see the "fireworks." So we climbed up into the tower, from which we had a very extensive view over the not far

distant battle line. It is a strange fact that in the humdrum routine of war nowadays the men stay buried in their holes during the daylight, because it is really too dangerous to go forward without the protection of night. Then when darkness has fallen they turn on the artificial light and go at each other. In a word, fire balloons rise and blaze their glare at intervals unceasingly along the whole horizon. You must keep a sharp lookout or the enemy will take you by surprise. And then the flash of the guns and the trail of the shells. It looks for all the world like a Coney Island display on the Fourth of July without the many colors.

VI

Dépot des Eclopés, May, 1916.

With Mme. B—— I went to visit one of the military dépots around Paris, where every day at sunset hundreds of French soldiers assembled to march away to take their places beside their comrades in the trenches. Some had been home on leave, some were just discharged from hospitals, some had been given the privilege of the convalescent, and an occasional one was reporting for the first time. Once a day those called to return duty entrained for the front. During the preceding twenty-four hours they had arrived, singly and in company, from all directions, and had made themselves "comfortable" on the rough straw beds provided in the dépot. They wore patched and faded

uniforms, often those of their dead comrades. The government had supplied them with these uniforms and added what spare clothing it could and a few inadequate necessities, but no comforts.

Of course, we did not go empty-handed, for Mme. B—— and her committee saw to it that no man went back to the front without his "comfort packet"—a little package containing a warm garment, perhaps a sweater, flannel drawers or a shirt, a cap, a muffler, socks and half a dozen useful little gifts of small value, such as razor, penknife, bit of string to tie his shoe, little mirror to admire himself in, writing paper, cigarettes, vermin destroyer, and such like. We loaded two motors with these packets and reached the dépot an hour or so before the time for the men's departure.

It was all most interesting. The sentinels at the gate smiled a welcome for Mme.

Officers of the Balloon Corps at Dinner

B—— and said the boys were expecting her. We went into the big, barn-like barracks, where blue-coated *poilus* and khaki-clothed colonials sat or stood about in groups, sometimes silent, sometimes earnestly talking. Others rested apart, examining their equipment and repacking their knapsacks. Others slept on the straw, while some were buying most unwholesome looking doughnuts and consuming them without any attempt at chewing.

The bags of comfort packets were brought in and laid on a long table at one end of the barracks. Was there a rush and a push to be first served? Not a bit of it. With quiet interest the men waited to be invited and then came forward without elbowing each other. Every man received a packet, many of which had been made in far-away America. Just think for a moment what this little human touch of kindness meant at

such a time. It was not the value of the gift, though the articles were often most useful. It was the spirit behind it which touched the man and not infrequently brought a tear of emotion to his eye. He had left home in all probability for the last time, for no man really expects to return from the trenches these days. What a worth-while kind of courage this almost commonplace courage of the soldier of to-day is! We need not imagine that he does not think. He knows what this war means to him and his. It is that ever-present spirit of simple, unquestioning, determined self-sacrifice which verily awes one each time it is encountered.

With the interest of children, the men took their packets, saluted their thanks and stepped aside to examine the prizes they had drawn. It was amusing and pathetic to watch them. The seasoned veteran with the tired eyes over in the corner heaved an almost

audible sigh of satisfaction. He had drawn a muffler, just what he needed, and the bit of soap and the very handy jack-knife were not to be disdained. The boy near him was more or less amused by his present. He felt too well equipped to need anything, for he was going out to beat the Bosch for the first time. A tough-looking, healthy fellow standing by the table opened his parcel and drew a rubber poncho. At his side stood a pale-faced man with glasses and the unmistakable stamp of education on his face. He looked longingly at the poncho and tightened the muffler around his neck. Then after a moment's hesitation he turned to me and asked if it would be possible for him to have one of those, even if he paid for it. I did not know where to find one in the few remaining packets, and as I hesitated his comrade turned and said, "But you take it, my friend. I can get along without it. I have slept in

the fields all my life. You belong to the city. Take it and may it bring you luck." That is typical of the spirit of the men.

The packets distributed, there remained huge boxes of candy and cigarettes. I took the cigarettes and went among the men, talking as I offered them. I was so eager to understand their point of view that I permitted myself to ask a rather cruel question. "How do you feel when, like to-day, you are going back to the front?" The replies were all alike in spirit. "It is our duty!" "We do not think of the future, but only to do our duty now!" "The Bosch must be beaten!" "France comes first!" Of course, out of the many I here and there received a flippant answer, but the majority were simple, direct, resigned.

In one corner three jolly fellows were having a home-made lunch before they left. They insisted that I taste it. It was the best

sausages in the world that "la femme" had made as a parting gift, and wrapped up with hard brown bread. The fingers that handled it and the knife that cut it were not appetizing, but we made gay together.

I came to a red-fezzed, black-faced son of Africa, handsome as a Greek god, neat and trim in his khaki uniform three times decorated. He must have seen action to have acquired three crosses, so I made bold to ask him what of all his experiences stood out most vividly in his memory. He smiled rather tolerantly as he answered that I would probably be disappointed when he told me that it was the dinner party he and three of his comrades had offered to four Germans who came during a lull to visit their trench. I looked puzzled, so he went on to explain. "The trenches were so close together we could almost shake hands. It was a pitch black night and we heard the Bosch com-

plaining that they were hungry. We whispered to them to come over and we would give them a treat. It took them a long time to get up their courage. Finally we felt rather than saw them coming, and suddenly they tumbled into our trench. We gave them all we had, and how those fellows ate! It was a joy to see them! And, do you know, they just managed to get back to their own trench when we had orders to attack!"

He had hardly finished speaking when the bugle sounded the call to fall in. The men shouldered their packs, heavy packs they looked, with tin cans and paper parcels tied on with string. The roll was called, and when the last man was marked present the bugle sounded again. No boomaladdie parade this, with shining boots and brass band. Two by two in sloppy formation they dragged their well-worn boots along. There was a stoop to most shoulders, even to the

L'ASSISTANCE AUX DEPOTS D'ECLOPES
72, AVENUE DES CHAMPS-ELYSEES, PARIS

VOUS NE LAISSEREZ À L'ENNEMI NI TRÊVE NI REPOS JUSQU'A L'ACHÈVEMENT DE LA VICTOIRE

JOFFRE

(You will leave the enemy neither peace nor rest until victory is achieved.)

LES PRUSSIENS SONT NATURELLEMENT CRUELS, LA CIVILISATION LES RENDRA FÉROCES

GOETHE

(The Prussians are naturally cruel, civilization will make them ferocious.)

N'AYONS QU'UN SEUL CRI, LA VICTOIRE QU'UNE VISION, LA PATRIE QU'UN IDEAL, LE DROIT

VIVIANI

(Let us have but a single cry, Victory; but a single vision, Country; but a single ideal, Justice.)

THE ABOVE POSTERS WERE PASTED ON THE WALLS OF THE DEPOTS, PRINTED IN LARGE LETTERING ON BRIGHT COLORED PAPERS.

young ones, but the spirit was all right. I studied the faces as they passed and I tried to realize where they were going and blindly sought to understand why. There was a smile of good-by from most and perhaps an additional "Merci bien, Madame!" Or if not a smile, then something that made me feel the greatness of each one of these human beings, willingly offering himself a sacrifice.

A Ruined Church on the French Front

VII

Venetia, June, 1916.

STILL another front and so very different from the others. After an interesting two weeks in Rome, where I had business to attend to for our Committee, I received the unexpected but welcome permission to enter the Italian war zone. My first stop was Bologna, that uniquely beautiful city of terra cotta towers and heavily arcaded streets. To-day it is one of the big hospital centers of Italy, and I walked through miles of wards and studied surgical dressings in active use in the operating and dressing rooms until I felt as if I could not stand the sight of another one.

By contrast my nine-hour trip in the train last night over the mountains was full of

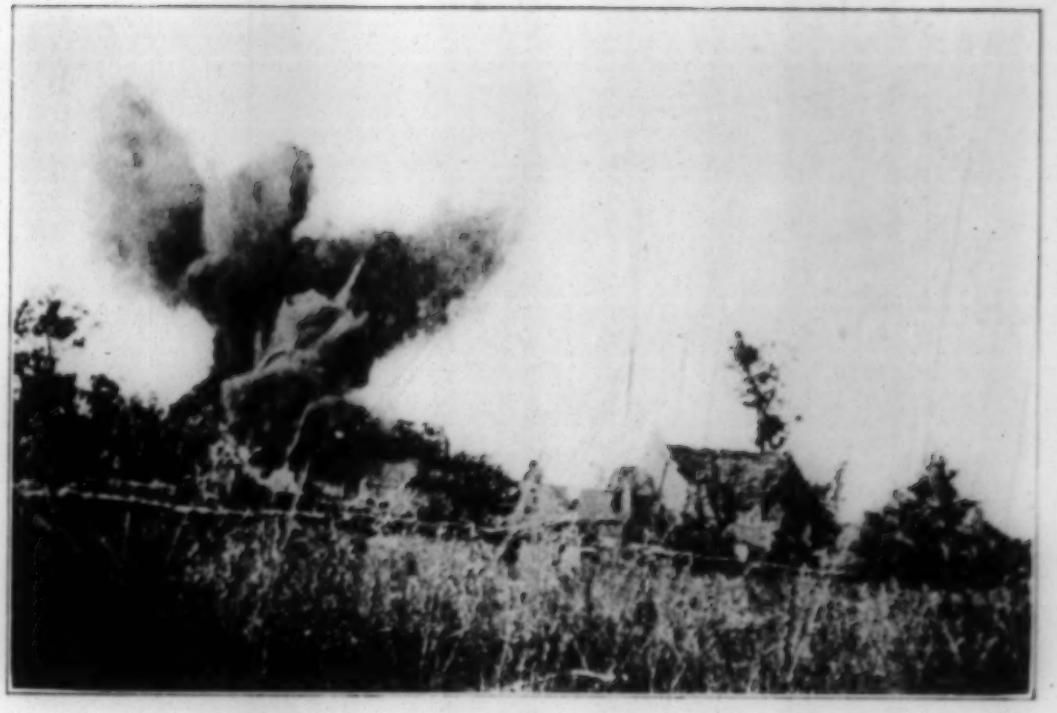
the most restful beauty and romance. I found a little corner compartment which I managed to keep all to myself by the simple expedient of pulling down the shades and feigning sleep on the sofa when we stopped at stations. I left Bologna at six o'clock and for two hours feasted my eyes on the beauty of the lovely Italian hills in the setting sunlight. Then the moon came up, big and round and calm. After a while we stopped at a cross-roads. There was a block on the single track ahead. I opened my window. Not a sound to be heard. My train companions in the other compartments seemed to be asleep. It was just so beautiful, I drank it in. Then in the distance a tenor voice broke the stillness with a Neapolitan love song. Slowly it came nearer and grew louder and sweeter until a figure appeared at the top of the road. He came on down to the track, singing all the while.

I never enjoyed a Caruso aria as I did that song from the heart. Next came a lumbering hay-wagon drawn by oxen, a drop in the bucket of supplies for the front. Then a special dispatch carrier on a motorcycle, beastly sound which broke the spell of beauty and took me back to the guns. He dismounted and silenced his machine, as the train was blocking the crossing. Two other men appeared from somewhere, arm in arm. The Italians never sleep and they always sing. It was not many minutes before the group had gathered together and were giving us a concert around the ox cart in the moonlight. I sat back in my corner and wondered if there really were a war.

At last we moved on at our usual snail pace which is characteristic of the trains in the war zone. Also trains seem to be always late in the war zone. No matter what time I started from a place, I was sure to land

at my destination between two and three A. M. True enough, about half-past two in the morning we drew into the station shed at Mestre, the point where all the gray-green uniformed soldiers and officers descended to return to their posts in the trenches. The train would stop some twenty minutes before it went on to Venice, so I got out on the platform, an object of interest to the many soldiers, as I was noticeably a civilian, a foreigner and a woman.

Almost simultaneous with our arrival a hospital train drew slowly into the station on the track next to ours. It came from the other direction. I stood in the center of the platform and looked at my train on the right. Many of the coaches were still filled with groups singing and gay, buying fruit and cheap wine from the shrill-voiced youngsters who ran up and down the platform with their wares. Officers of importance lounged about, non-coms ran the length of



Shell Explosion

Tent Hospital in the Dolomites

the train giving orders. I looked to the left, where huge Red Crosses stamped the sides of the light-truck, third-class carriages filled with enduring, pain-racked human beings. Here and there glued to the window was a bandaged head with two eyes looking out of hollow black-rimmed holes. The bandages were nearly always stained red. Even though the hospital car was but very dimly lighted, thanks to the ever-present aëroplane, I could see the feverish ones tossing about on their stretchers, disclosing bloody bandages on arm or leg or body as the case might be. As I carried a special permit to visit any military hospital or dressing station in Italy, I climbed into the train and walked through half a dozen cars. How I wished I had a hundred or so odd-sized little cushions with me! What a comfort they would have been to those men who yesterday did their duty to the end, and who would now for *three or four days* travel unwashed, their

mud-caked uniforms still on them, in most cases their dressings unchanged, through the blistering heat of the Italian summer, to their destination in Rome. I tried to say a cheerful word here and there in my best Italian, but somehow it seemed so futile. There they lay through no fault of their own, alone and suffering hour after hour, and there on the other track, with courage undaunted by this sight, hundreds more were going north to take their turn. The physical side of war may be hell, but in the moral side there is certainly some kind of divinity.

The engine of my train whistled and I hopped back into the carriage. In ten minutes we had crossed the lagoon and were in Venice. Venice again by full moon. Years ago I arrived at this very station at midnight when the moon was full. Life and bustle were then everywhere, and the gay-lanterned gondolas were gliding up and down the Grand Canal with music and song in full

blast. This night the same full moon shone down, but the silence and lonesomeness were overwhelming. After some waiting an old man managed to find me a gondola. I got into it with my little handbag and heavy coat, and for three-quarters of an hour we moved slowly and silently up the Grand Canal, where every window in the medieval palaces was barred and shuttered, and every branch canal and narrow passage deathlike in its stillness. Not a voice in the Venice one thinks of as always awake. Not a sign of life did I see except the aëro patrol on the tops of several of the high buildings, their guns pointed skyward, ready for action. When we reached the Hotel D—— all was barred and closed. The old, stooped-back porter, who was finally aroused by the loud pounding of the gondolier, looked as though he had seen a ghost when he opened the door to let in a woman traveler in Venice in war time at three o'clock in the morning.

VIII

Italian Front, June, 1916.

I CAME down from the highest mountain peaks on all the Italian front, the Dolomites, where General di R—— sent me in his motor to the very peak next to one occupied by the Austrian guns. For the first and only time in my travels I was on soil conquered from the enemy. We could easily see the position of their guns through the glasses, and we were at great pains to hide the motor behind a screen of trees out of sight of those evil guns. I simply cannot describe the picturesqueness of that two-hundred-mile ride through one of the most beautiful mountain sections in Europe, over magnificent new roads, now the pathway for man, beast and food on the way up to the unbelievable war

among the snowcaps. We passed through all kinds of camps, and I had excellent opportunity to realize the terrific difficulties of this front.

The following day we motored down out of the hills and into the flatter country behind the front where the Austrians had for the moment broken through. I was honored by being taken by the Duchesse d'A—— to visit a front line hospital here. In a little village the stone schoolhouse had been turned into a temporary ambulance. A shell had fallen in the yard the day before, so the head surgeon feared they might be driven back any moment. Think what that means when you already have two hundred freshly wounded men in a place that can only accommodate a hundred and fifty, and ambulances are arriving every half hour with more. In the operating room six naked men, or what remained of them, lay on six differ-

ent dressing tables, each with a red hole or stump out of which the doctor was *pulling red gauze,* or into which he was *poking white gauze.* For over thirty-six hours without rest these surgeons had been on duty. Is it any wonder that they could not be over-gentle, that they were sometimes blind to the writhing of their victims, or deaf to their groans and shrieks! That is a sight I can never forget and I left it as quickly as I could, weak in the knees, and glad to hear the door slam behind me.

The next room we entered was somewhat less awful. Iron cots were crowded into it as close as you could pack them, with a human wreck in each one. They were what are known as the "Grands Blessés," that is, the men most dangerously wounded. I won't describe them, though the picture will never become indistinct. As the Princess entered every hand that had the strength to

move attempted a salute. She went about, speaking a kind word to each one and tying a little tin medal with the colors of Italy on their wrists. The two women who were taking care of these two hundred or more men told me they were not quite sure whether it was two or three days since they had gone to bed. They were ladies who before the war had never known what manual labor meant. "There come moments like this," they said, "and then somehow we seem to find the strength, but it is awfully hard on the surgeons. Besides it's so difficult to keep the men clean and supplied with what they should have even as bare necessities. We hate to see them in dirty, blood-stained linen, but what can we do? Look! there come two more ambulances." And all the time they were working while they talked.

Oh! we at home, who are often bored by the daily headlines telling of trenches taken

and lost, let us stop, think and imagine! What is our responsibility and how do we meet it? Is there really one of us with a heart and mind who dares to let twenty-four hours pass without dropping his mite of time, sympathy or money into the brave hand of suffering Europe! Men, women and children, they need us! If we do all we can, then we are not doing half enough! The horror of their suffering is hideous! The magnificence of their sacrifice is sublime!